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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001283

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/19/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EPET](#) [PARM](#) [EUN](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: EU SPECIAL ENVOY MOREL MEETS NIYAZOV -- TRIES TO
ENGAGE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Jennifer Brush for reasons 1.4(B)
and (D).

Summary

11. (C) EU Special Envoy (and former French Ambassador to Turkmenistan) Pierre Morel met with President Niyazov and Foreign Minister Meredov December 18 and gave Charge a readout on December 19. Highlights of the meeting include:

-- Observance of a more bloated and less animated Niyazov than the 1992 vintage with whom Morel met when he was posted to Ashgabat in 1992 immediately following independence;

-- Niyazov's categorical rejection of a Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP) in favor of increased pipeline capacity through Russia (and Gazprom);

-- Interest in border security cooperation with references to Turkmenistan's bilateral programs with the USG as "exemplary;"

-- Interest in non-proliferation, including building a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty seismic site, and pride in stopping Iranian/North Korean overflights, when requested;

-- Growing paranoia over Iran and the politics of Iranian President Ahmadinejad. End Summary.

Bloated but Coherent

12. (C) According to Morel, Niyazov looked bloated and tired, but was still coherent, during their two-hour December 18 meeting. Morel remembered Niyazov immediately following independence as being animated and fun-loving, stopping short of charismatic. Morel said that, though the animation was gone, Niyazov still methodically and cogently went through his achievements and challenges during the December 18 meeting.

13. (C) Morel said he also was impressed with Foreign

Minister Meredov, contrasting him with his predecessor, the now imprisoned -- and possibly dead -- Boris Shikmyradov. Morel recounted his meetings with Shikmyradov while both were serving as ambassadors in Beijing. Even then, Morel said, Shikmyradov said he knew Niyazov considered him competition, "that's why he sent me somewhere with no direct flights to Ashgabat." Meredov, on the other hand, Morel, thought, presented himself carefully and thoughtfully and as completely loyal to Niyazov.

¶4. (C) Morel said his meeting with Oil and Gas Minister Atayev was "painful." Atayev had nothing to say, according to Morel, and furthermore seemed to have been instructed to say nothing. (Comment: Charge was surprised at this characterization of Atayev, who is a competent bureaucrat and who in the past has been authorized by Niyazov to speak "openly." End Comment.)

No TCP

¶5. (C) According to Morel, Niyazov dismissed the TCP as impossible because of the intransigence of the Azeris and instability in Georgia. Instead, Niyazov said, Turkmenistan would concentrate its efforts on negotiating for a new littoral pipeline along the northern shore of the Caspian Sea. In response to Charge's question, Morel agreed that Niyazov's definition of proliferation of pipeline options to supply the European market consisted of more pipelines under Gazprom's control. Niyazov did not mention a Trans-Afghan pipeline and was dismissive of the plans for the Chinese pipeline, saying "we'll see."

ASHGABAT 00001283 002.2 OF 002

Interest in Border Security

¶6. (C) Niyazov was quite positive about the possibility for increased border security cooperation with the EU. He mentioned border security cooperation with the United States as "exemplary." Charge noted to Morel that the USG was not quite so positive about the cooperation. Though security cooperation was important to us, we saw little cooperation in the areas of greater transparency or improved border security operations. Charge outlined plans for the May 22 opening of the Imamnazar border crossing station and said the embassy was planning for a series of events leading up to the opening. She said EU and UN cooperation would be very welcome. Morel said that the EU already had assisted with Tajikistani-Afghanistani joint security projects, but that the Afghanistani side had been unprepared for any meaningful participation. He said he hoped with increased German cooperation in training Afghanistani border police units, that there would be opportunity for joint Turkmenistan-Afghanistani border security training and cooperation.

Non-Proliferation Cooperation

¶7. (C) Morel said Niyazov had been proud to note Turkmenistan's denial of over-flights, on several occasions to flights between North Korea and Iran. He said Turkmenistan would continue to deny such requests when it received credible information that the flights were suspect. During a subsequent meeting, Morel said, Meredov was enthusiastic about building the seismic station under the aegis of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization. Charge responded that this should be a win-win opportunity for Turkmenistan, but instead, following the visit of CTBTO Preparatory Commission Executive Secretary Tibor Toth, nothing had been done.

Fear of Ahmadinejad

¶8. (C) Morel said Niyazov spoke at length of his fear of Iranian President Ahmadinejad and his politics. Niyazov spoke nostalgically of his relationship with former President Rafsanjani. Still, Niyazov said, Turkmenistan's commercial relationship with Iran was going smoothly. Though the Iranians had been behind in their payments for gas earlier in the year, they now were caught up and Niyazov looked forward to increased deliveries of gas both through the pipeline and as liquified natural gas.

Comment

¶9. (C) Morel appears to have a realistic appreciation for possibilities for EU cooperation in Turkmenistan. He agreed completely that, with the mutual hatred and incriminations in the region, talk of regional cooperation was premature and possibly counter-productive. Morel also seems not to have had promotion of a TCP as part of his agenda. He said he raised it briefly, but did not push it. Post looks forward to working with the EU on border security projects and in general with Special Envoy Morel. End Comment.

BRUSH